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# south african Jewish Report

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## Defiant private *minyanim* happening despite high risks

TALI FEINBERG

Private *minyanim* are taking place in the homes of South African Jews in spite of Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein’s decision not to open shuls yet and warnings by medical experts about the dangers of Jews gathering to pray during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Johannesburg rabbi speaking on condition of anonymity told the *SA Jewish Report* that he is independently hosting a group of about 12-14 young men in an open area for a regular *minyan*. “I think it’s a necessity. These same people are going to work and to the shops. We are taking all the precautions – using sanitiser and everyone is wearing a mask. If something were to happen, we would immediately close it down.”

He says this private *minyan* “isn’t as popular as one might think”, but this group approached him, and he saw no reason to say no. It is not associated with any shul or congregation. He understands that the massive outbreaks of COVID-19 in Jewish communities overseas have been attributed to Jews gathering for prayer. However to his mind, “people were already sick, and were gathering in small shuls without taking precautions” when that happened.

He understands the chief rabbi’s decision to keep shuls closed. “He has to decide what’s best for the whole community and for shuls where it’s much more difficult to enforce the rules. So it makes perfect sense not to open the shuls.”

Should a member of his *minyan* contract the virus and pass it on to a family member, “It would be difficult to point the source of infection to the *minyan*, as people still go to the shops and to work,” he says.

The rabbi’s comments come as Jewish communities around the globe are reeling from disproportionate losses to COVID-19.

Professor Barry Schoub, the founding and former director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases of South Africa and professor emeritus of virology at the University of the Witwatersrand, says, “We know that congregate environments are, in particular, one of the most important super-spreading events as has been clearly documented by several outbreaks in houses of worship. Israel’s interior minister and the head of the Shas party, Aryeh Deri, recently claimed that 70% of COVID-19 cases in Israel were in the Haredi communities, known to have held illegal *minyanim*.”

“These private/secret *minyanim*, now in Johannesburg, in spite of their assurances of strictly adhering to coronavirus infection-control precautions, are simply putting people’s lives at risk. Furthermore they aren’t only threatening their own communities but also, because of the highly infectious nature of the virus, the community at large.”

A Johannesburg doctor with 40 years of experience has witnessed *minyanim* gathering in the homes and gardens of residences or has been told about them from reliable sources. “I’m 100% sure that it’s happening,” she says, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“From the beginning of lockdown, there has been a *minyan* in an apartment block – you can hear them saying Kaddish. There was a *minyan* in a home over Pesach under lockdown level five. I’ve seen elderly people visit the home of a doctor – that has a Sefer Torah – at mincha.” She has seen large groups gather

for a Brit Milah, and now under lockdown level three, has heard of people having 30 guests for Shabbos. “These gatherings include people with co-morbidities. I know of a man who almost died a few years ago, who attended a private *minyan* in someone’s garden.”

In her opinion, the safety of these private *minyanim* depends on their practices. Are they reading from the Torah and crowding around it? Are they touching the Torah? Are they wearing masks? Are they sharing siddurim and chumashim? Are they

sanitising? Are they having Kiddush after the service and sharing food? Are they going home to family members who might have co-morbidities?

“We know so little about this virus. We can’t be careful enough. In these *minyanim*, who is supervising what happens? The point is, we need to think of our whole community, not only ourselves,” she says. “Many important rabbis and *frum* [observant] doctors overseas have spoken about the danger of gathering to pray, and have explicitly said don’t

have private *minyanim*.”

She can’t understand why some members of the community have been so lax in sticking to the restrictions. “Maybe it’s because we haven’t had major losses? Maybe we are making up our own laws or misinterpreting them? But the bottom line is *pikuach nefesh* – saving life above all else. Rabbis and doctors should set an example.”

Schoub agrees. “As Minister Deri said, we need to do very deep soul-

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## Solly Krok steps out to combat the ‘worst crisis in 1 000 years’

TALI FEINBERG

Solly Krok was named after his grandfather who died in the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918/1919. Now, just over a century later, Krok is living through a different global pandemic, and he decided that at the age of 91, he had to help those suffering most under South Africa’s lockdown.

Inspired by Sir Tom Moore, the British army veteran who raised £39 million (R829.9 million) for charity in the United Kingdom, Krok committed to walking 91km by his 91st birthday, and to raising R108 million to help feed vulnerable people in South Africa. Thus far, more than R2 million has been raised.

The energetic great-grandfather is best known for his multiple business successes as well as being the man behind the creation of the iconic Apartheid Museum and his commitment to philanthropy over the years.

He had walked 50km by his 91st birthday on 28 May, and brought the total number to 91km by 4 June. “I started on 1 May, so I walked for a total of 34 days,” he says. “For the first 23 days, I managed only 2km a day. After that, I increased it to 3km, 4km, 5km, or 6km a day.”

He called his venture “Keep the wolf from the door”,



Solly Krok on his big walk

an idiom which means keeping hunger and poverty at bay. He outdid himself by eventually completing 100km on 4 June, supported by community and business leaders who joined him in taking the last steps of a significant journey.

“The Comrades Marathon was cancelled this year, so Solly did his own Comrades and beyond,” says Howard Sackstein, who was the master of ceremonies on 4 June, a day of discussion and celebration as Krok completed his goal. “To walk 100km at 91 years of age is a remarkable physical feat, especially with such energy and enthusiasm.”

Krok was joined by leaders in the business and non-government sectors, such as Discovery Chief Executive

Continued on page 4>>

## There’s a zebra on my stoep

JORDAN MOSHE

Joggers in Glenhazel were greeted by the sight of a zebra grazing the grass when they set out for a morning run on Tuesday and Wednesday this week.

Residents converged to gape at a zebra and two donkeys enjoying a bite to eat behind the perimeter gate of a vacant plot on Galliot Road.

Ziggy Stripes is a rescue zebra being housed temporarily in Glenhazel after being transported from a farm in northern Pretoria, says Dr Dean Gersun, an ear, nose, and throat specialist and animal lover.

“During lockdown, I heard of a farmer who had no space or feed to care for a zebra in winter,” Gersun told the *SA Jewish Report*. “He had been abandoned by his mother, and bottle-fed and raised with horses on the farm. He was entirely domesticated, and could not be released into the wild.”

Having grown up with a mother with a passion for looking after abandoned animals, Gersun immediately set out to find a home for Ziggy – or Willem as he was known then. He arranged a wildlife vet to sedate and transport the zebra to Glenhazel to a vacant plot of land fit to accommodate him.



Estee and Azriel Gersun with Ziggy Stripes, the rescue zebra

“It’s an uninhabited, one-acre plot with ample grazing space and shelter,” says Gersun. “It’s secured by an electric fence, and has a guard outside.” Ziggy was later joined by two donkeys from a farm near Alberton, whose transport Gersun also arranged.

When the trio was observed by residents this week, Gersun says he was inundated with hate mail accusing him of animal cruelty and behaving unethically. He stresses, however, that the entire arrangement has been made with the approval of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and non-profit organisation Animal Allies. “It’s all legal,” he says. “We have

the permits and have been liaising with SPCA inspectors. Once we have the permits necessary to transport them, we will move them to a sanctuary near Dinokeng or on the Vaal.

“For the moment, though, they are under the supervision of a vet, under cover, and have plenty of grazing.”

The three animals remain thick as thieves for now, and welcome the attention they’re getting.

“Ziggy is more like a dog than a zebra,” says Gersun. “He sleeps inside, plays with kids, and can be fed and patted. I think it’s amazing that we have such an opportunity here in Glenhazel.”



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# Fear spreads coronavirus stigma

NICOLA MILTZ

“I was in a deep, dark place, and couldn’t see a way out of the despair,” says a Johannesburg mother who was shunned and bullied online by the community after she attended a Batmitzvah in March unaware that she was an asymptomatic carrier of coronavirus.

Weeks before the country went into a nationwide lockdown, this woman, who has asked not to be named, was at the infamous 40th birthday party in Westport, Connecticut, in the United States where several people including South Africans unwittingly contracted the dreaded virus.

The mother of three, 43, a chartered accountant working in private equity, arrived back on Monday, 9 March, when there were already a number of documented cases of coronavirus in the country, and went to work the next day. That night, she attended the *simcha*. The following day, Gary Sweidan, the first member of our community to test positive, and who had also attended the 40th in the US, called to tell her his news. She immediately went for a test, self-isolated, and waited for the results to come out several days later. She was positive.

It wasn’t long before members of the community accused her of spreading the disease, and of being “reckless” and “selfish”. She was stigmatised, vilified, and lambasted by people she knew on WhatsApp groups

that she was on.

During that “terrible ordeal”, she wrote some of her thoughts down, sharing them with the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “The stress of fighting off an absolutely vicious Jewish community who spread lies and hate about me and my family is taking its toll on me emotionally and physically. Never before have I felt so isolated and alone.

“I pray that my family and I make it through this absolutely hideous time, and I pray that none of you will ever have to go through this yourselves.” She was prescribed Xanor to help with anxiety.

“While I was panicking about my own life, people were attacking me on social media, accusing me of purposefully trying to infect people.”

She is severely immunocompromised.

“While I was panicking about my own life, people were attacking me on social media, accusing me of purposefully trying to infect people.

“No one goes out looking to contract the world’s deadliest virus or to contaminate others with it,” she says.

“There were many amazing people who reached out to us with love and support, but it’s hard to focus on the positive when you are being called a “p\*\*s” in voice notes, and are receiving all these scathing messages that have gone viral.”

She can joke about it now, but it wasn’t funny at the time.

Her experience is arguably what people fear more than the virus itself – the stigma of this highly infectious and as yet incurable disease.

As the country’s number of cases rise daily, the number of people in the community admitting they have tested positive for COVID-19 has dwindled.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the reason for the stigma is that “it’s a disease that’s new and for which there are still many unknowns, and we are often afraid of the unknown”.

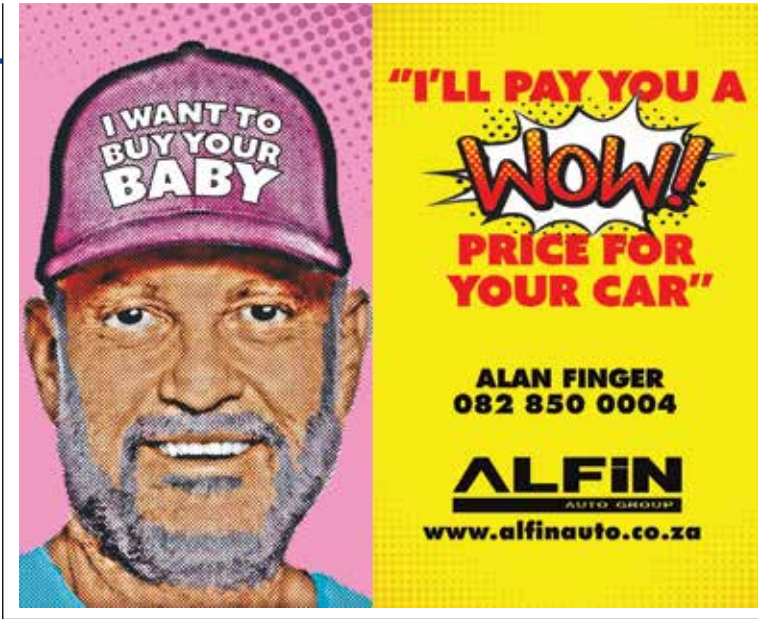
Some experts argue that the stigma spreads faster than the illness itself.

Emeritus professor in virology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Professor Barry Schoub, says the stigma is concerning.

“There’s been a noticeable and widespread reluctance to come forward to be tested by people who have symptoms or who have been in contact with an infected person. The reason may be twofold – either because of the perceived stigma that one may be identified as a ‘spreader of disease’ or concern about the possibility of a 14-day quarantine and potential loss of income from work absenteeism.”

Sweidan says he has no regrets about going public. It was the responsible thing to do, and he was lauded by medical experts for doing so. However, he still fields “odd comments”.

“Some people believe that I’m ‘Patient Zero’ – the person



who brought the virus to South Africa. I still get the odd chirp here and there, mostly said in jest and in good spirits, but if said to the wrong person, might be hurtful. Thankfully, I’m thick skinned, so I just brush them off.”

Johannesburg GP Dr Daniel Israel says the illness has sparked irrational fear. “A person who runs a business, for example, who tests positive for the virus doesn’t want to divulge this information for fear that his customers won’t come back for months. They rather book themselves off for a cold or gastro. I’ve seen this a fair amount.”

He says if someone has been in quarantine for 14 days, they no longer pose a risk. “However, there is still this fear of contracting the virus from them.”

The important thing is to evaluate the real risks of exposure.

A person is at a high risk of contracting the virus if they have not worn a mask, and have had more than 15 minutes of exposure to an infected person, and have been less than one metre away from them, Israel says.

If they did wear a mask and had 15 minutes of exposure, then they are considered low risk, and the recommendation is to self-isolate.

“However, some people consider themselves high risk if they were in the same building as someone who contracted the virus. This is driven by fear and stigma.”

Experts worldwide agree that when people hide the illness to avoid discrimination, they are less likely to get tested or treated. “This avoidance of testing has serious implications for outbreak control, hampers contact of infected individuals and their contacts, and compromises the collection of authentic data,” says Schoub.

“Sadly, there are no more Gary Sweidans. Our numbers are growing,” says Zev Krengel of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. “In our community, there are about 60 people in Cape Town and at least 30-40 in Johannesburg, with many self-isolating. A lot of people stay quiet. They don’t want people to know,” he says.

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# Solly Krok steps out to combat the ‘worst crisis in 1 000 years’

>>>Continued from page 1

Adrian Gore; Afrika Tikkun Chief Executive Marc Lubner; Michael Rudolph, representing the Siyakhana Initiative and the University of Johannesburg; ArkKonsult Chief Executive Dr Ivor Blumenthal; top tech journalist Arthur Goldstuck; and personalities from the media.

They walked and talked about everything from food security to job creation, which are just some of Krok’s passions. “We had beekeepers and people talking about worm farms and food gardens,” says Sackstein. “Solly is so concerned about small businesses that after every discussion, he asked, ‘How can we create jobs?’ or ‘How do we start a business?’”

Another of Krok’s passion is technology. When he was walking with Goldstuck, “Solly pointed out that businesses must use search engine optimisation (SEO) to be more visible online. Arthur was astounded to hear this from someone who is 91 years old,” says Sackstein.

Meanwhile, “Every few laps, Solly’s biokineticist assessed him, and he just kept going. At times, those walking with him had to speed up to keep up! He was so jovial, dancing in the street. The last lap was a socially distant celebration.

Neighbours came out in their masks, and we were all waving South African flags. It was a special moment for him and this country. He will go on to raise millions,” says Sackstein.

Krok said he felt “exhausted but exhilarated” after reaching his goal. “I’ve never walked or run in my life, and at first it wasn’t easy. But one day, soon after I began the challenge, I saw the fence ahead

of me in the distance and realised I could do it – I just had to reach the fence. The lesson is to take small steps to reach a big goal.”

He took those small steps every day, rain or shine, sometimes accompanied by friends or family at a distance, but mostly on his own. The distance he walked – around an enclosed area near his home – was measured by an online application and checked by a chartered accountant.

“The funny thing is, I think I’m young!” laughs Krok. “My mindset is to be positive in life. I pushed myself, and I think I will keep going.” He is full of ideas, such as encouraging other elderly people to take similar walks, or teaming up with icons like Moore to form a club of seniors taking on such challenges.

He says it all began when he was talking to Gore about the long-term effects of the pandemic on South Africa’s most vulnerable. “I said what’s worrying me is that the poor will remain poor after COVID-19, and the welfare initiatives may stop. He challenged me to do something like this walk, and I took on the challenge!”

Initial funds raised will go to Afrika Tikkun and Siyakhana to provide food parcels and training for those in need. “You have to help people to feed themselves,” Krok says. He is excited about the opportunities that our rapidly changing world can give to those who are often marginalised.

He envisions people selling home-grown fruit and vegetables online, being able to work

remotely, or training themselves using online resources. Another idea is to ask wealthier South Africans who are marking a special occasion to donate towards the planting of fruit and vegetable gardens for the needy in the

tradition of Jews planting trees in Israel to celebrate milestones or remember a loved one.

“What’s unique about this venture is first, Solly’s age, and second, his vision of sustainable food projects,” says Sackstein. “He isn’t just raising money, giving it to those in need, and walking away. He is asking, ‘How do we leave a legacy

so that hunger doesn’t continue?’ That’s why he is pushing for new businesses and for people to grow their own food. At a time of chaos and crisis, to have that long-term vision is unique.”

Krok has seen a lot in his lifetime, and he believes the COVID-19 pandemic is “the worst crisis the world has seen in 1 000 years”. At the same time, he believes we can empower ourselves in the face of such darkness. “Have a positive approach, visualise success, and make it happen. Have passion. Life is for the living!”

To the Jewish community, he says it’s more important than ever to unite and help our fellow South Africans. “Life is precious. to save one soul is to save the whole world. We must do everything we can to support others, no matter their race, colour, or creed.”

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Solly Krok on his big walk

## Torah Thought

### Heed your calling for greatness

Even though we find ourselves in the midst of the Hebrew month of Sivan, our *parsha* this week, Behalotcha, takes us back to an auspicious date just more than a month ago.

The 14th of Iyar is the date set aside to fulfil the *mitzvah* of Korban Pesach for those who couldn’t bring their offering on *erev* Pesach because of circumstances beyond their control. The *parsha* tells us the reason for this remarkable “second chance”. “These Jews who were in this case impure because of contact with the dead approached Moshe and asked (Bamidbar Chapter 9 verse 7), ‘Why should we be diminished?’ In other words, why should we lose out on doing this *mitzvah*? On a deeper level, why shouldn’t we reach our ultimate potential and experience the spiritual completion this act will bring us? This small group of passionate individuals brought about a new *mitzvah* in the Torah which would benefit them and subsequent generations.

Pesach Sheini always occurs during

Sefirat Ha’Omer, and begins the week of the character trait of Hod which hosts Lag B’Omer. The sefira is a time when we think about Rebi Akiva – during that week in particular. Rav Moshe Shapiro explained that the character trait which inspired these desert dwellers to demand a second chance also drove Rebi Akiva to strive for greatness and not be content with mediocrity and ignorance.

Legend describes how he witnessed a steady dripping of water splashing onto a stone, realising that over many years, the soft water had eroded away the hard rock. He reasoned that if such a gentle substance can penetrate such a course element, then how much more so could Torah, which is compared to water, make an impression on his soft heart! He asked, “Why should I be worse than a stone? Why should I not be worthy to learn? Why should I lose out on this opportunity?” Realising the void he could fill, he stubbornly fought against the odds because why should he be diminished?

Rabbi Shmuli Kagan,  
Bnei Akiva




It says that when Rebi Akiva died, honour for the Torah was lost from the world. Rebi Akiva honoured the Torah because he was aware of the greatness that lies in all of us, and the specific ability of the Torah to bring out our best. He taught that all humans are created in the image of Hashem, and the Jewish people are called His children. (Avot Chapter 3 Mishna 18) The omer period asks us to contemplate how this great teacher amassed 24 000 students and became a person about whom Moshe Rabeinu asked if Rebi Akiva exists, then what does Hashem need Moshe for? Similarly, Pesach Sheini reminds us to ask, “Why not us?”

When we feel a deep calling to act, it’s a plea to fulfil our potential, to bring out what we are worthy to reveal, and not settle for being diminished or incomplete. And when we listen to that call, we can achieve extraordinary things.

Shabbat Shalom

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# SAUJS condemns antisemitic post and blood libel



**T**he South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) this week condemned a Facebook post by the university's Palestine Solidarity Forum (PSF) which made use of antisemitic tropes and blood libel.

In a bid to appear relevant, the UCT PSF posted a two-year old *Al Jazeera* article titled, “Durham first US city to ban police training with Israeli military.” The PSF captioned the article by posting, “It’s about time to boycott Israel because it brings nothing but discrimination and criminal mentality. Time to revive the academic boycott campaign at UCT? I wonder until (sp) when we’ll stay captured and controlled by the Zionist blood money?”

The *AI Jazeera* article which appeared in April 2018 explained how a group of pro-Palestine organisations in the city of Durham in the United States state of North Carolina lobbied the city council to ban training and exchanges between Durham's police department and the Israeli military. The activists drew on alleged similarities between Israeli treatment of Palestinians and Durham police's treatment of African Americans.

SAUJS Western Cape “condemned” the PSF’s use of antisemitic tropes and blood libel in a statement on its Facebook page, calling on the organisation to retract and apologise.

“We have seen time, time, and time again the replacement of the word ‘Jew’ with ‘Zionist’ in ancient antisemitic tropes. One cannot say they aren’t antisemitic when their very actions and words reflect a poisonous hatred that has persisted throughout the ages. When 90% of South African Jews state that they are Zionists, it’s not difficult to see the attempt to make antisemitism more palatable.”

SAUJS National Chairperson Ariel Goldberg told the *SA Jewish Report*, "It's imperative that we call out



all forms of antisemitism. It's our moral duty and responsibility to work together towards the creation of a tolerant society in which no discrimination exists. We are saddened and disappointed by the discriminatory and antisemitic comments posted by the UCT PSF, and echo the call for it to make a public apology for its remarks."

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), said, "This is just a post trying to be relevant with some antisemitism mixed in for good measure. This is the same crowd who stole the SAZF's Israeli flag and painted it with red blood about two years ago during Israel Apartheid Week. As usual, their Jew-hatred leaks through the thin veil of anti-Zionism."

Another commentator who preferred to remain anonymous said, “This is the normal boycott, divestment, and sanctions anti-Semitism. The other day, they were saying they don’t believe that money is actually influencing the university as this fed into antisemitic stereotypes. Now suddenly, the university is Zionist controlled.”

SAUJS Western Cape urged the UCT community to condemn discrimination “in all its forms”.

“SAUJS UCT has always strived for an environment where healthy dialogue can prosper and progress can be made, and we call on the UCT PSF to commit to doing the same,” the organisation said.

## TALI FEINBERG

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**J**ust as the Highlands House Home for the Jewish Aged is beginning to contain its coronavirus outbreak, a second Jewish care facility in Cape Town has been hit hard by the virus. Glendale Home for the intellectually disabled has 50 residents, 20 of which have tested positive for COVID-19. “An outbreak of COVID-19 at a Jewish communal facility like Glendale has always been the community’s worst fear, with the profile of resident and medical complications that exist,” says Cape SA Jewish Board of Deputies Chairperson Rael Kaimowitz.

“However, an outbreak of this nature is inevitable, and the focus should be on the pre-planning that was done many months ago to prepare for the inevitable outbreak. I want to applaud the efforts of Chairperson Judith Cohen and Director Shelley Korn for their professionalism, efficiency, and urgency in activating those plans so effectively. We have every confidence that this outbreak will be managed in the best way possible, and we offer all assistance and resources of the community to help in any way.”

Twenty-five residents have tested negative. Two residents' results are still outstanding. Three residents have been with their families since the beginning of lockdown, and aren't affected. Nine staff members have also tested positive. Twenty staff members have tested negative.

“Getting the call that my son had tested positive was terrifying,” says the parent of a resident. “I always feared that this day would come, even though the home has done everything it can to protect residents.”

He says his son, who is almost 50, doesn't understand what's happening, but is asymptomatic and happy to be confined to his room. "I haven't seen him in person since March. It's very hard. I'm also deeply concerned for his carer who is asthmatic, and who tested positive. She is doing fine, but has taken such risks to care for my son."

The home discovered its first case on Saturday, 6 June, “when the home received results indicating that one resident and one staff member had tested positive for COVID-19. During the course of the day, another two residents began displaying symptoms,” said Cohen, in a letter to the community.

The home immediately moved from unit lockdown, in which the residents are divided into small groups, to room lockdown, in which they are confined to their rooms.

“After Shabbos on 6 June, an emergency Zoom meeting was held for families. Assistance was received from Highlands House, and together, it was arranged for COVID-19 testing kits to be delivered overnight. A team of eight doctors, headed by Dr Leon Geffen, entered the home on Sunday morning just after 07:30 to test all residents and staff on the premises. During the course of Monday 8 June, test results started coming in, and residents and their families were informed.”

Cohen told the *SA Jewish Report*, “We have been preparing for this for three months. The home has been in total lockdown since 12 March. Education programmes [about the virus] for staff and residents have been conducted during this time. Staff members have made major sacrifices, with some

living on the premises and not leaving since the home's lockdown began.

“The home has also been transporting other staff to their homes, meaning that they have to leave home earlier and get back later. Staff that can be separated from residents have been kept completely apart from them, such as cooking and laundry staff.

“Many staff members have been here for decades and the residents are like their children. They work 12-hour shifts, and have been using full PPE [personal protective gear] for weeks now, including gowns, aprons, medical masks, and face shields.” Monitoring at the gate is extremely strict. Yet the virus still found a way in.

**Continued on page 11>>**

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# For South Africans in the US, protests ring a bell

TALI FEINBERG

“My South African and Jewish background, including anti-apartheid activism, has profoundly shaped my understanding and support of #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) and many similar ideas, practices, and groups,” says South African-born Professor Fran Buntman, who now lives in Washington DC.

Although she left South Africa 30 years ago, seeing George Floyd die under the knee of a policeman was a heartbreaking yet familiar moment for Buntman, whose primary research areas are prisons, law and power, and inequality, especially in the United States and South Africa.

“I felt horror, disgust, and anger at such cruelty. It happened in broad daylight, with both the victim and the public begging for him to stop. Only my training in social science allowed me to watch it and try to understand it, my human self didn’t understand.”

An assistant professor of sociology at George Washington University, she says, “So far, I’ve avoided protests because of COVID-19 health concerns, but I’m fully supportive and appreciative of them, including supporting my 17-year-old twin daughters in attending them. I support racial and social justice in other ways, from having #BLM and similar signs on our house so passers-by can see them, to donating money to Black-Jewish dialogue groups, to solidarity and mentoring, to education on criminal-justice issues.

“The looting has thankfully been limited,” Buntman says. “The fact that looting is minimal is a testament to



the majority of the protesters and the leaders of various resistance groups. These people, far more than police, have prevented most of the looting. Trevor Noah was also on the mark when he said that if you felt unease watching the looting, then, “Try to imagine how it must feel for black Americans when they watch themselves being looted every single day.”

George Floyd’s death is just one of a number of recent incidents that sparked the protests, Buntman says. “When I came to the United States, I was naive to the depth of racial inequality that exists.

“In the thirty years that I have lived here, I have never seen a moment like this, when so many people, no matter what their background, are talking about the same thing. People are coming out in their millions. They are aware of the health risks, but feel that there are bigger issues at

stake. A lot of it also has to do with [President Donald] Trump. People are worried that our democracy is in serious danger of not surviving him. Personally, I’m more scared of Trump than the looters, just like I was always scared of the apartheid police, not the anti-apartheid protests.”

She isn’t alone. Nicky Wheat moved to the US from Johannesburg in 2017, and lives on Mercer Island, east of Seattle. “It’s a very white community, and we are now learning that people of colour have never felt very welcome. I attended a vigil organised by a woman who grew up here, but always felt ostracised. She told us she was so overwhelmed that people attended, as she always felt that no one ‘saw her’, and didn’t think people cared.

looted. It was a bit scary knowing this was ten minutes away. Tensions are high.”

Talya Chalef, originally from Cape Town, has lived in New York for 10 years. She attended a protest and took photographs at Cadman Plaza in Brooklyn, where a memorial service for George Floyd was held, and a sit-in at Fort Greene Park.

“I have been wary of attending events because I’m on a visa and can’t afford to get arrested,” she says. “But the memorial service, which was at a World War II memorial, was beautiful. It felt

hand sanitiser, snacks, and water. “The Fort Greene sit-in was a quieter event. Pitched as a way to regenerate, the idea was to ‘take a breath’. Different speakers facilitated breathing meditations, and there was a silence of 8.46 minutes across the park.”

Jackie Maris, formerly of Cape Town, also lives in New York City. “I have just returned to NYC after two weeks in Ohio, so I haven’t yet been involved in the protests in person. I hope to attend rallies and protests in coming days,” she says.

“Friends who have attended protests say that the crowds are fired up, but acting peacefully. Wariness of police is a factor.” Maris cites an incident on Friday night as an example. “Police trapped hundreds of New Yorkers on Manhattan Bridge for no clear reason. They lined each end of the bridge, and



These photographs were taken during a recent memorial service for George Floyd in New York



Photos: Talya Chalef

“It was a peaceful event, organised with the police, ahead of curfew. People lit candles, sang songs, and shared stories. I went because I care, and because of my Habonim background. I love where I live, and it pains me that people feel they don’t belong.”

Wheat has also experienced the effect of looting by protestors. In the city of Seattle where she works, “the bottom-floor windows of every high-rise building are boarded up, either after being smashed or to prevent them from being

hopeful, engaged, energised, and sincere. One thing that stood out was how mixed the crowd was. Young, old, families, black, white, mixed. It felt very much like the spirit of New York – proud, defiant, kind, loud, expressive, empathetic, and liberal. It also felt historic, almost nostalgic, like we were at a rally in the 60s.

“I couldn’t hear the actual service very well, but the cheers, chants, and applause from the crowd of thousands was moving. The degree of organisation was also surprising. Given the fact that we’re still technically on lockdown, I was taken aback by how many were out, and how everyone had a mask on. Volunteers were handing out masks,

wouldn’t let the marchers move. It was believed to be a scare tactic. After several hours in the dark with little communication from police, protesters were allowed off the bridge.

“I recognise that I have benefited from a white-supremacist system, both in the US and back home in South Africa,” she says. “It’s on me and all white people to do the work of unlearning racism, and to put that work into action. A start would be to challenge overtly racist comments at Shabbat dinner tables, to call out the micro-aggressions that Jews of colour face in our communities, and to do the work necessary to unlearn racially prejudiced patterns.”



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# Hearing the voices of our youth in 2020

On 16 June 1976, South African youth made themselves heard in a way that changed history. Today, we listen to what our young people have to say because so often, they know more than we do, and are sensitive to things we have long forgotten. The *SA Jewish Report* asked educators at our Jewish schools to give their youth a platform to tell us what 16 June 2020 means to them. We were spoilt for choice. Read the incredible maturity and wisdom in their writing. – Ed

## Viva la revolución!

BRAD GOTTSCHALK

Holidays and commemorations are always a time of reflection. Reflection of change, reflection of the past, and reflection of the future. As I write this piece for Youth Day, I automatically reflect on life during last year's Youth Day commemoration – and things couldn't be more different!

A year ago, I represented my school in a march down Vilakazi Street in Soweto to the Hector Pieterse Memorial, alongside people from all walks of life. This year, tributes for Youth Day will be held on Zoom at home. We might feel as if we are living in an entirely different reality, but there is one constant every Youth Day – the feeling of standing up to an oppressor and fighting back.

Why is this year different? Youth Day, falling in Pride Month, elicits a feeling of rebellion and anger with the status quo. Although it may feel like we're stuck at home, we're potentially witnessing, supporting, and taking part in one of the most consequential fights for civil rights in the United States. Although it may feel like we are stuck at home, that feeling of disdain due to our unfair landscape has only been amplified.

Though Youth Day is a time of reflection and commemoration, it can also be a bitter reminder

of the fact that we need to uphold the lessons of the past because injustice is still present. I could make the comparison of police brutality in America to police brutality in apartheid South Africa, but right at home right now, countless people have been murdered by South African police under lockdown. In the long and tiresome fight for equality, feelings of resilience might turn into an acceptance of the status quo, but Youth Day and Pride Month are there to remind us to keep that angry spirit alive.

If we don't sacrifice and fight for a better world, we are doing an injustice to those who fought before us. Hector Pieterse's fight in 1976 is our fight in 2020. The famous queer liberation fighter Marsha P. Johnson's fight in 1969 is our fight in 2020. Names and dates change, but injustice doesn't – and neither should the fighting spirit. This Youth Day, let's commemorate those who fought and died for a better world, and this Youth Day, let's raise our fists against all injustice in 2020.

Viva la revolución!

• Brad Gottschalk is in Grade 12 at King David High School Linksfield.



King David High School Linksfield pupils take part in the commemoration of Youth Day in 2019

## Education – the answer to making real changes

EVA TROPE

When Youth Day comes around, we have an obligation to look for an opportunity to create change.

Rather than only honouring the sacrifices of the past, we should implement the ideals we learn on this day. But how? How can we encapsulate a day so important, so fundamental to South African history, and effectively use it to form a better society? The pathway to honouring the legacy of Hector Pieterse and the other 176 fallen youth is through education.

In the Soweto uprising, not only did black children fight for their right to be taught in their own languages, but for the opportunity to have an equal education to white children.

With unemployment skyrocketing in South Africa at around 35%, the highest in the world, the solution lies in education. According to Global Partnership, 420 million people would be lifted out of poverty with a secondary education, thus reducing the number of poverty-stricken people worldwide by more than half. Research also shows that children whose mothers can read are 50% more likely to live past the age of five.

Not only does education benefit economies and societies, but also social movements and equality. If every girl worldwide received 12 years of quality

education, lifetime earnings for women could increase from \$15 trillion (R251 trillion) to \$30 trillion (R502 trillion) globally.

Educated people choose better governments by making informed choices. Educated people stimulate the economy by working, earning more money, and spending it locally. Educated people are taught to think, create, and work towards a better society, and it is our job, as privileged, educated people, to try to give these opportunities to less advantaged citizens.

From eliminating discrimination to going green, there are many causes we must fight for as a country, but I believe that if we focus on education – quality, widespread, equal education, not only will we have a better society, but a means to an end. Educated people are likely to discover solutions to many different problems as they have the knowledge and learned logic to do so, creating an ever growing and evolving cycle from education to

prosperity.

This Youth Day, I plead for the Jewish community to focus on giving donations to organisations that help teach the untalented, to give old textbooks, and volunteer at less fortunate schools. To treat the problem, rather than put a flimsy Band-Aid over it.

• Eva Trope is in Grade 9 at Yeshiva College.



## Making our voices heard

HANNAH FARBER

When Nelson Mandela started his journey in politics, he began with the youth. Mandela

along with Anton Lembede, Walter Sisulu, and Oliver Tambo established the African National Congress Youth League. The league's aim was to inspire the youth to take a stand against segregation. In the past, present, and future, the youth have been and always will be the most active group in society.

Growing up as a teenager in the 21st century is so different to our parents' generation. They didn't have the influence of technology, Hollywood, or social media in their lives. Whereas we have no censorship of what we see, we are highly influenced by the people we watch and their opinions, whether they be political, social, or personal.

In this generation, the youth has a voice like never before, whether it be via Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter. These platforms are places where we can voice our opinions and be heard. For example, last year's trending hashtag #genderbasedviolence and #AmInnext? was all over social media. It was a campaign online and on the streets, with multiple protests and more than 30 000 posts. It's just one of the many examples of how our voice can have such a large impact.

On 16 June 1976, multiple school students came together to demonstrate peacefully in the streets of Soweto. These students were protesting the fact that due to the Bantu Education Act, subjects such as mathematics and social studies were taught in Afrikaans, making it extremely difficult for them to learn. Soweto students may not have had a social-media platform, but they had a voice, a voice with which to stand up for themselves, their

education, and what they believed in.

Though it resulted in deaths and casualties, the voice of the youth was heard along with a powerful message. It resulted in one of

the many steps taken to abolish apartheid.

South Africa became a democratic country in 1994, yet in 2020 we aren't free to leave our homes without a mask. This Youth Day, even though I'm in lockdown, I'll make sure that my voice is heard. I'll be posting on my social-media accounts, and making sure that people are aware what exactly Youth Day is and the power of our unified voice as the youth of South Africa.

• Hannah Farber is in Grade 10 at Yeshiva College.



## A reminder that life is priceless

SAMARA JAY

The Torah tells us that preservation of human life takes preference over everything, and confirms that one may break Shabbat to save a life. If something so holy as Shabbat can be compromised for a human life, surely this applies to all humans in all situations?

Thinking back to 16 June 1976, a day when innocent lives were senselessly lost, the heartbreaking image of Hector Pieterse keeps replaying in my mind. We all believed this type of police brutality would cease to exist upon the birth of democracy. However, 26 years later, millions of distressing images like that of Pieterse's flood the minds of democratic citizens around the world.

It seems ironic that we have been commemorating Youth Day for so many years, yet the injustice the day highlights continues to dominate news headlines. We can no longer

overlook the stark reminder this day offers us to subjugate police brutality.

Police brutality is defined as officers who exercise excessive force against a citizen. It's effectively a civil-rights violation instigated by the very people who are meant to protect those rights. It's when the protectors of society actually morph into the destroyers of humanity. Statistics show that police brutality often occurs in protest situations and beyond racial lines. While not all police succumb to using brute force, there is an underlying issue in the system that needs to be addressed.

George Floyd, Ahmed Timol, Hastings Ndlovu, Marielle Franco, Antonio Zambrano-Montes, Neil Aggett, Breonna Taylor, and Griffiths Mxenge ... These well-known victims represent the catastrophe of police brutality. But what about the thousands of unnamed who

die at the helm of their protectors? This week, *Daily Maverick* reported 11 deaths as a result of policing during lockdown in South Africa. With Youth Day looming, how do we still hold such little value for human life?

As a 16-year-old, Youth Day highlights the fact that youth have great wisdom and courage. It's a sombre day that reminds South Africans of the injustices of apartheid, but it's also an inspiring day that celebrates progress and freedom.

Youth Day teaches that it's essential that our voices be heard to protect human rights, but not at the peril of human life. On this anniversary, let's listen to the Torah, and speak out about police brutality and inequality because human life is priceless.

• Samara Jay is in Grade 11 at King David High School Linksfield.



## We don't know enough about history



EVA MARANEY

Youth Day is a chance to reflect on what it means to be a young person in South Africa. What is my position and responsibility as a 17-year-old white, Jewish woman in post-apartheid South Africa? There are many things I love and appreciate about my school and community. However, I find it somewhat regrettable to have grown up in a post-apartheid South Africa lacking a black narrative.

To deal with today's inequality and racism in our country, we must understand the history and legacy of colonialism and apartheid, and our position of privilege.

I have always been inclined towards social justice. I have grown up in a liberal and open-minded family. For years, I have been a part of Hahonim Dror, a left-wing Jewish youth movement that encourages critical thinking. I go to one of the best schools in the county. Yet, still, I find that I haven't been exposed nearly enough.

Learning about apartheid and colonialism at school showed me how much I didn't know, and still don't know.

People who haven't taken history in high school might never learn about racism in our country. History is compulsory only until Grade 9, and in those few years, one covers only an inadequate volume of information.

Learning about racism – as opposed to experiencing racism – is a part of white privilege. Being able to stay silent about these issues is a part of white privilege.

It would be ignorant to say that racism doesn't exist within my school or within the Jewish community. Racist language and rhetoric often flies under the radar.

Often, we feel as if we cannot create change by ourselves, but we have

## I may not experience the target on my back, but I can fight it

SASHA-LEE WOLFSOHN

June 16 is a reminder of how privileged I am. I didn't have to fight for the right to an education. I don't feel targeted because of the colour of my skin. I have a freedom that so many young people could only dream of having in the 1970s – and today.

This year, there will be so many more layers to Youth Day. Being under lockdown may seem like an undeserved punishment to lots of people, but I don't understand how that can be the case. Especially those of us who live in wealthier neighbourhoods and whose biggest concerns is finding something new to watch on Netflix and not being allowed to go to the beach.

I don't understand because, for some

people, lockdown has meant death at the hands of the South African Police Services and South African National Defence Force. Collins Khosa, Robyn Motsumi, and Sibusiso Amos are just three examples of black South Africans who died as a result of excessive force and brutality in the hands of those who we are supposed to protect us.

Who do you call when the police are the murderers? That question has been plaguing the entire world for just over two weeks since the death of George Floyd in America. For many people, the phrase "black lives matter" has felt like an attack. Certainly not for me.

As a Jewish person, I have an understanding of what it's like for my people to be persecuted. But as a white person, I know that I will

never experience the target-on-my-back sensation that people of colour have had for centuries. That doesn't mean I can't fight for their rights. Our people experienced similar circumstances in Nazi Germany, after all.

So, on 16 June 2020, I will be proud of my generation, and the generations that came before us. We stood up to those in power. We fought and protested. We brought about change. Lockdown won't take that away from us. We are the generation that grew up surrounded by technology, in a globalised world.

My heart continues to break for the world – which seems to be as full of hate as it was 50 years ago – but I know that change is going to come.

"The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow." – Nelson Mandela

• Sasha-Lee Wolfsohn is in grade 12 at Herzlia.



Rowan Sandler and Tali Pantaowitz, Head Boy and Head Girl of King David High School Linksfield 2019, at the June 16th Memorial Acre

## With opportunity comes responsibility



However, with opportunity comes responsibility. Lockdown may have hindered our ambitions to go out into the world and tackle things head-on or make bigger contributions to our communities, but as a resilient group, South African youth have managed to process the situation well. Some of us have even contributed to a wave of volunteerism: helping to launch virus-tracking software, community-aid tools, and ventilator blueprints. Medical students have become makeshift doctors.

On Youth Day, we are reminded of our power as well as our objective to make things better for the future. We are reminded to fight for what we truly believe in so those around us are treated better and the younger generation will enjoy the luxuries we fought for. Forty-four years ago, the youth fought against the apartheid system, with their education and families at heart. Now, 44 years later, the youth fight against COVID-19, with their education and families at heart. This year, we will commemorate the fought-for freedom at home and online where possible, thus helping to fight for the health and safety of fellow South Africans and future generations.

• Audreen Murewa is in Grade 10 at King David High School Victory Park.

## Remember and celebrate the power of youth

AMIRA BENGURI-KARSTAEDT

Youth Day is a junction on the calendar. Unlike the usual hustle and bustle of daily life, 16 June is a day meant for slowing down and looking both ways – to the past and future – before crossing.

We are reminded of the courageous and outspoken black youth who participated in the Soweto uprising 44 years ago. We take time to recognise those students' role in the painful and arduous journey leading up to the end of apartheid, and we show solidarity and gratitude.

However, Youth Day isn't only a memorial, but a celebration. We celebrate the power of the youth, who have always been regarded as the agents of a brighter future. It's with this vision of a better future that Youth Day is able to encourage today's youth to stand up and enact change.

The Soweto uprising of 1976 resulted in tragedy, with many innocent young lives lost in the noble process of resisting oppression and fighting for the human right to a decent education. Yet, in the long-term, it has been an example of the youth's determination in spite of all odds, which sends an optimistic message to present-day South African youth.

Unfortunately, there is still injustice and oppression in South Africa and across the world, which makes Youth

Day even more inspiring and important. Every year, Youth Day is an empowering day for me in which I am able to connect to others and engage with South Africa's history.

It has certainly been a challenge to feel as empowered while confined to my home in the wake of a global pandemic. Even though our physical circumstances seem to neither liberate nor unite us very much, the exact opposite can be said for our spiritual circumstances. South Africa has been working as a single entity to flatten the curve, and a significant effort has been made to uplift one another during these difficult times.

It's safe to say that Youth Day might not feel the same this year, but different isn't always a bad thing. I'm hopeful that the coronavirus pandemic will cause us to be more mindful of all that South Africa has accomplished with the help of its youth. After all, this pandemic has pushed us to adapt, and the way in which we celebrate Youth Day 2020 will be no exception.

• Amira Benguri-Karstaedt is in Grade 11 at King David High School Victory Park.





# Bassin, Boikanyo, and being her brother’s keeper

TALI FEINBERG

For Marilyn Bassin, giving is a way of life. A physiotherapist by training, she has worked with indigent children for nearly 30 years.

Nine years ago, she founded non-governmental organisation Boikanyo: The Dion Herson Foundation. At that time, Bassin met a dynamic young child with cerebral palsy named Boikanyo, who inspired her to do more to help others like him. Boikanyo means “to have faith” in Setswana, and that’s what Boikanyo is all about.

Through its outreach projects, the foundation also aims to honour the memory of Bassin’s late brother, Dion Herson, a man who was generous, kind, and cared about the welfare of others before himself.

“We work with children and their caregivers living in impoverished communities in Johannesburg. Our mission is to address poverty alleviation holistically. We aim to challenge the general prevailing mindset of hopelessness and helplessness among our target group due to poverty and poor living conditions,” Bassin says.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, “We were busy in squatter camps helping the poor in Soweto. We were following up on numerous households there, and checking on children with cerebral palsy. Unofficially, I also followed up on animals in the area along with the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals). Our biggest programme was a mass education project, which we ran in a school in Protea Glen once a week, teaching maths to Grade 4s and 5s. This ran for only five weeks before lockdown began.”

Once the lockdown started, Bassin could no longer visit the townships where she had spent years helping children in desperate circumstances. “I used to park my car, get out, and walk. Everyone knew me and loved me. But I couldn’t continue going there once the lockdown started. For the first time in nine years since I started my non-governmental organisation, I had nothing to do.”

This lasted four days before Bassin realised, “I can’t live like this. I need to do something.” She started raising money for those in need, and also contacted her friend Rose Kransdorff from the e’Pap Foundation.

“Together with the e’Pap Foundation, we started distributing this highly fortified cereal, rich in most of the vitamins and minerals needed daily. We send it to other vetted registered non-profits and civic organisations all over South Africa for them to hand out as they see fit,” says Bassin.

“We started planning our first handout in Eldorado Park. Things have just grown from there, and we have now supplied 31 000 children with a month’s supply of e’Pap. If I hear a certain area is starving, we go into that area. In KwaZulu-Natal [KZN], children are three times hungrier than anywhere in else in South Africa. We did six drop offs of e’Pap in KZN; then we went into Limpopo. A lot of research also goes into finding NGOs to distribute the goods.”

Every day is different for Bassin, and on the day she spoke to the *SA Jewish Report*, a dream



Marilyn Bassin

came true. “I’ve always want to get e’Pap into the Transkei area in the Eastern Cape. It’s an 18-hour drive from Johannesburg, and we needed contacts there. Then we heard there is a little hospital in Port St. Johns, and a staff member went to the headman of the area and asked for permission to bring food in.

“Today, she phoned to say we can go ahead. We are furiously trying to organise two tons of e’Pap to be delivered to Port St. Johns. We are also working with Rotary International to deliver vegetable seeds along with the e’Pap, so that in six weeks, people will have cabbages and carrots. If we just send 30 days of e’Pap, they will be hungry again. They need to know that they will have their own vegetables.”

In spite of pivoting her focus since the start of the lockdown, Bassin’s life hasn’t changed much. “I never looked at myself as someone ‘chosen’ for anything. I’m purely a conduit,” she says. “You tell me children – especially those with cerebral palsy – are starving, well that’s the recipe for me to make a plan.”

One thing that has changed is that her work has more publicity. While she doesn’t seek the spotlight, she understands it helps her cause, “and the cause is always greater than the individual”.

Bassin takes the pressure that comes with doing work like this in her stride. “I believe it’s meant to be, and if it’s for the greater good, it will happen. It’s not just up to me but the forces at work around me. I often say that I’m taking a ‘band of angels’ with me, and right now, these angels are working hard, and keeping us going.”

Her family has chosen to join her. “They all do a different aspect of it. I’m inattentive at times, as I’m always busy, but they don’t mind and enjoy sharing and contributing ideas.”

Her organisation’s most urgent need is money to buy e’Pap. “We would also like to go into Lesotho – they are starving. In the United Nations World Food Programme, Lesotho is marked red as it is so hungry. We hope to send two tons of e’Pap there, and hopefully more.”

Another challenge is finding the people and vehicles to transport e’Pap. At the same time, although her organisation is small, she has a huge network. “If you ask someone for something in the right way, they will do it for you,” she says.

She has never felt unsafe. “If the community appreciates what you are doing, you are safer than anything else,” she says. She knows she risks contracting COVID-19 as she goes out into communities, but notes that she is also a risk to them. However, she feels it’s worth it.

She is most inspired by people who participate in any way they can, and take the work seriously. She has seen the worst of the worst circumstances, such as a young woman in Limpopo with young siblings and a newborn baby to care for, who punched the air with joy when given e’Pap, as she had absolutely nothing else. “Her face showed that this meant survival to her. It was tragic and inspiring.”

From all she has seen and experienced, Bassin says, “We aren’t all in the same boat. We can’t forget about people who aren’t seen and have nothing. We are all connected. I look after you, you look after me. We are all our brother’s keeper.”

• To donate, visit [www.boikanyo.org.za](http://www.boikanyo.org.za)

# The angel behind the network

TALI FEINBERG

When Glynne Wolman started The Angel Network in 2015, she never imagined that it would one day play a vital role in helping others during a global pandemic. Yet today, the organisation is on the frontlines of the humanitarian crisis that has worsened under lockdown in South Africa.

“Everything has changed,” Wolman told the *SA Jewish Report*. “For the six months prior to the lockdown, we were assisting with appeals as we received them. We have always tried to give a ‘hand-up’ as opposed to a ‘hand-out’ so that people aren’t dependent on us. Currently it’s only about hand-outs to prevent millions from dying of starvation.”

The organisation’s focus has changed dramatically. “In the first week in March, not one cent went towards food. In the last week in April, more than R320 000 went to food. Since the crisis, we are spending 90% of money on food parcels and e’Pap.

“The scale of work is overwhelming. We are inundated,” she says. “There are no to-do lists or plans for what has to be done tomorrow. As I open my eyes in the morning, there are requests, calls, emails, and messages, and one is literally just thrown in the deep end day after day. Before COVID-19, we were assisting 50 non-governmental organisations, outreach centres, safe havens, and orphanages, who together numbered about 40 000 people. Currently, we are trying to help more than 90 organisations which equates to helping well more than 100 000 people.

“The Community Action Network (CAN) initiative, which originated in Cape Town, has made our lives that much easier in that of the 70-plus operational CANs in Gauteng, at least 40 are being run from people within our community who are mostly assisting our beneficiaries. This frees us up to assist refugees, marginalised rural communities, as well as new beneficiaries and individuals. Together with these CANs, we have supplied close to 700 000 meals in less than two months. We have raised well over R3 million in two months, excluding the R9 million donation that the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD] received. That donation is a game-changer, as we can now spread our reach to many more provinces.”

For Wolman, every day is different. “I get up, start working, and don’t stop for 15 to 16 hours. Unfortunately, we have no help at home at the moment, so my ‘free time’ is spent quickly doing a load of washing, making supper, or tidying up. I had visions of reading, watching Netflix, and catching up on sleep, but I guess Hashem had other plans!”

Before the current crisis, Wolman didn’t like talking on the radio, and being on TV wasn’t even up for discussion. “Now, I just take it in my stride, and don’t think about it. I realise that the more exposure we receive, the more people we will be able to assist. Until COVID-19, the biggest donation we received was R211 000 from a company in the United Kingdom, so suddenly being faced with handling millions is a huge responsibility.

“Luckily I don’t have to make these decisions on my own as I have an executive committee as well as the SAJBD that I work extremely closely with. Initially, I got very



Glynne Wolman

stressed with the pressure, but realised that I could do only what I could do. Now, I do as much as I can, knowing that tomorrow is another day.”

Wolman admits that balancing this work with the rest of her life isn’t easy. “My family are very proud of The Angel Network, but they don’t love the fact that I’m so inaccessible at the moment. My husband is completely amazing: washing dishes, mopping floors, and vacuuming. I’m often told by my kids that they come after The Angel Network, which definitely isn’t true, and I hate that they feel or even think that way. This too shall pass.”

She said the organisation’s most urgent need was to assist hundreds of thousands of individuals. “Lindi Katzoff, on our executive, has come up with a brilliant system where an individual who wants to help is paired with an individual who has no means of getting food. We connect them, a Checkers voucher is sent via a cell phone, and the person is able to buy food. Hayley Glasser, also on our executive, is trying to raise funds for blankets that children can wear, as they have sleeves. We would love people to donate to that as it’s getting colder.”

To those of us who feel overwhelmed about helping others as we face our own crises under lockdown, Wolman advises, “Helping has never been easier than it is now. Start a CAN, join a CAN, make food and deliver to people, do somebody’s shopping, send vouchers, knit for babies, collect and donate non-perishables, assist the elderly, or just phone someone who is lonely. Today [Friday 22 May], a friend crossed town to bring me two challahs. It was the most touching thing. We need generosity of spirit. Everyone is having a hard time, and nobody is immune.

“The South African Jewish community makes me proud to be Jewish every single day,” she said. “We are there for one another, and come together as a family when needed. This community has been incredibly supportive to The Angel Network right from the start, and your support is overwhelming, to say the least. There are no words strong enough to convey our gratitude for all that you do.

“That being said, it’s hard when we receive criticism from fellow Jews on how we should be helping our own. People are people, and thank G-d, there are organisations in place to assist our own or we couldn’t do what we do. We receive no government funding and rely on donations. We also incur no running costs, and nobody earns a salary. My garages are our warehouse. The challenge is being able to help every single soul.”

She said that what motivates her to get up and do this work day after day is the “difference we are making to people’s lives”.

“I spent many years wondering what my purpose was, and worrying that I may never know. As clichéd as it sounds, the day The Angel Network began, I knew I’d found it.”

• To help, visit [www.theangelnetwork.co.za](http://www.theangelnetwork.co.za)



# The superhero who staves off starvation

TALI FEINBERG

“I wonder what Madiba is thinking about what is happening to all his children this year,” was the thought foremost on Helen Fraser’s mind when she spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* amidst her endless efforts to ensure that children in underprivileged communities don’t go to bed hungry.

Fraser’s enthusiasm for South Africa’s youngest citizens shines through. In fact, her unabashed adoration of children may just match the love that Nelson Mandela had for them. On Mandela Day on 18 July, she usually arranges a day of festivities for



Helen Fraser

children at the Nashua building in Johannesburg as the founder of the Nashua Children’s Charity Foundation (NCCF).

“Usually, children turn the Nashua building upside down on 18 July!” she says. It’s possibly her favourite day of the year, when R400 000 worth of food, groceries, and essentials are distributed to needy children and their families.

Now, for the first time in the 14 years since she founded the NCCF, this Mandela Day celebration can’t happen because of the pandemic.

Instead, this year she hopes that “Mandela Day will be spent delivering food parcels in the very rural Limpopo area of Ga-Dikgale. We just need another generous sponsor. We need to feed 3 627 children. The 20 drop-in centres that they depend on for sustenance have not received groceries since February. Marc Lubner is making a sizable donation, and Feed SA has very generously donated 500 hampers, but we need a sponsor for another 1 300.”

Meanwhile, the crisis caused by the COVID-19 lockdown has taken centre stage in her life.

“There are so many of us from our community who are making things happen for the almost 15 000 children that we [the NCCF] permanently assist, but now, so much more is needed,” she says.

“When I founded the NCCF 14 years ago,

supporting just two orphanages, the farthest thing from my mind was that we would be assisting 73 orphanages, early childhood development centres, special-needs centres, special-needs schools, outreach centres, feeding schemes, soup kitchens, and more than 1 000 children living in three informal settlements. And then the pandemic hit. I’m used to seeing hunger, but I’m not used to seeing starvation. In my 30 years of working with children, this is unprecedented.”

Most of the children in the orphanages her organisation assists usually spend their day at school, where there are feeding schemes. “All the orphanages had to supply was a snack,” Fraser says. “Children would also sometimes visit a foster family or guardian on weekends or during holidays. But under the lockdown, the children are there 24/7, and the orphanages aren’t coping.”

The NCCF has therefore had to step in and step up, providing everything from fresh produce to meat, to basic toiletries. There are also child-headed households or grandparent-headed households that are dependent on school feeding schemes and now need to feed youngsters at home. Again, the NCCF has stepped in to assist.

Fraser has also teamed up with members of the Jewish community to organise major food drives. This has included creating campaigns and organising drop-off points, then channelling the goods to where they are needed most. She has also raised funds for bulk shopping of groceries and other essentials. Along with a team of volunteers, she will buy a truckload of non-perishables, stationery, and essentials to be sent to just one community, and then do it all again the next week. “Our monthly spend at Dis-Chem, Pick n Pay, and Makro averages R200 000,” says Fraser.

Every year, she has organised a flatbed truck with 20 pallets of groceries to be delivered to rural Limpopo, and was thrilled to be able to do so again this year.

She isn’t afraid to team up with other organisations and share the load, and has worked closely with other Jewish female superheroes Glynne Wolman and Marilyn Bassin – featured in this newspaper – as well as many other South African Jewish community members. “I just want to do *tzedakah* [charity] and *chesed* [kindness]. My Jewish identity is a driving factor,” she says.

Her family helps her be a mother to many. “My husband, Mel, is so patient and believes in what I do. And he does the grocery shop!” she says with a smile. Much of her work is done in memory of her late daughter, Hayley, who especially loved the times that the NCCF took children on trips to game reserves and Sun City.

“I’ve never known how to say no. I sometimes panic and think, ‘What’s tomorrow going to bring? How many more are we going to need to help?’” says Fraser. “But I keep going because I want to see children smiling again.”

## ‘Worst fear’ realised as COVID-19 hits second Cape care facility

>>Continued from page 5

“We planned as if it would happen, but hoped it wouldn’t. We have had six scares when it was suspected, so we have had six drills to prepare residents. But nothing can prepare you emotionally for when it really happens,” says Cohen.

She says most residents are between the ages of 40-70, with at least half over the age of 55. Only a handful are showing symptoms, and one is on oxygen. Many have serious co-morbidities, from heart disease to blindness to diabetes. “Their bodies are ‘older’ than their ages,” she says.

There are other major challenges. For example, it’s difficult to enforce the wearing of masks. Many residents are non-verbal and can’t communicate that they aren’t feeling well, and are therefore being monitored closely.

A doctor has been visiting regularly since the outbreak, and there is another doctor as well as the Community Security Organisation on call 24/7. There are nurses on site 24/7. Some residents don’t have families, and some have

elderly parents. Therefore, the home is the only place they can be. She says most residents do understand that there is a virus that’s harmful to them and they now need to stay in their rooms to be safe.

Seeing doctors don full “hazmat” suits before entering the premises was a mind-boggling moment for Cohen. “It was what we saw in Wuhan, and now it’s here.” She was amazed that eight doctors – not all of them Jewish – volunteered to come to the home early on a Sunday winter’s morning to test residents. “This community really blows you away. These doctors all put their hands up, and said, ‘We’ll be there.’”

The community can help in a number of ways. First, support the families of residents; second, provide financial assistance to cover the costs of doctors, PPE, tests, oxygen, and families who are struggling to pay fees; and third, follow the home on social media to show support and keep up to date. Glendale wants to be as transparent as possible, and will keep the community informed, Cohen says.

Advertorial

# Rimar revolutionises investment technology

It’s not only the investment world, the world in general is becoming more and more complex with more data available in real time to more people than ever. The investment landscape is following suit - technology and technology related investment techniques are becoming increasingly more popular.

The question many industries face is whether humans are still relevant? The answer is yes, but to what extent and in what role? It’s evident that industries around the globe are striving to implement technology driven solutions to address business processes and ultimately achieve better and faster results. A similar notion exists within the investment industry, in which an increasing number of investors are following quantitative and artificial-intelligence-based investment strategies.

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# How to keep love alive when we can’t leave

JORDAN MOSHE

COVID-19 has taken a toll on many interpersonal relationships, and while some are flourishing, others are falling apart.

If we want to emerge from this trying time with our bonds intact, we need to find new ways to engage with one another under lockdown.

So said Michael Kallenbach, an internationally renowned relationship therapist and marriage counsellor, who outlined the challenges facing couples for a Zoom audience at eLimmud on Sunday, 31 May.

“These are different and difficult times, and many of us are struggling,” said Kallenbach. “No one has been asked to navigate this before.

“There are those who are staying home and can’t work, those who can work from home, those who have returned to work, and those who have lost their jobs. They’re all facing challenges.”

Kallenbach said numerous couples had asked him for help to address relationship issues that had arisen in the circumstances.

“Relationships, be it with your spouse, partner, boyfriend, or girlfriend, have had a toll taken on them over this time,” he said.

“Suddenly, you notice things about that the person you are living with who you thought you knew. They chew with their mouth open, they make noises that you never noticed before, and leave their shoes lying around. Sometimes they just blink, and that irritates you enormously.”

No one is alone in feeling this way, he said, pointing out that people respond differently to the reality of being cooped up at home. For some families, lockdown has inspired closeness, bonding with long-

distance friends and relatives in a game of Bingo over Zoom. Others are struggling socially, and finding that their relationships are rapidly falling apart.

“The lockdown has made it crushingly obvious how few friends I have,” Kallenbach read from an advice-column submission. “I feel depressed and

lonely. It feels as though everyone else is having Zoom parties, quizzes, and

meetups while I’m sending the odd message and going to bed early after spending the day talking to no one except my partner and a one-year-old.”

It emphasises the fact that relationships are a two-way street.

“Your partner may have something they need to work on, but remember that doesn’t mean you’re completely blameless when it comes to relationship problems. We all have a stubborn streak, and no one likes to admit they’re wrong.”

It means that instead of yelling at your husband when he leaves a sock on the bedroom floor, you opt to have a mature discussion about what you expect of him in future.

“This ensures that each of you understands what the other expects of you and your relationship,” he said.

During the lockdown, new rules come into play.

“Good communication has become touted as the number-one requirement for any happy relationship,” said Kallenbach. “Most couples who consult me have trouble talking to each other. It’s not surprising that a lack of communication can cause serious relationship problems.”

Couples need to learn to speak up when their partner does something that annoys them, he said. “Tell them what you take issue with, how it makes you feel, and offer a solution to avoid it in future. Allow him/her to do the same, and remember to have

mutual respect.

“This allows you to deal with small disagreements before they become serious. Don’t brush things under the carpet – they’ll fester. Tell the guilty party what you expect.”

Kallenbach believes that couples go through harmony, disharmony, and then repair, calling it an inevitable dance routine.

“By definition, we fight,” he said. “You often hear people say their parents never fought, but I’m sceptical. You might fight that their childhood wasn’t so ideal. What matters is how you fight and resolve differences.”

It starts by evaluating your own faults. “Don’t look at the other first,” said Kallenbach. “Look at yourself, and see what you need to change. It doesn’t mean you need to be the only one making changes, but the two of you need to establish boundaries and mutual respect.”

Remember also to show appreciation for what your partner does right, expressing gratitude

with as little as a cup of tea in bed on a Sunday morning.

Additionally, the process includes establishing routines and celebrating rituals, separating meals from meetings, and cherishing moments like Shabbat meals or birthdays.

“Rituals help families stay connected,” said Kallenbach. “We are now using Zoom to get together and it’s a new way of life, but routine and ritual [even in this new way] helps us to separate the ordinary from the special.

“As the lockdown continues, we need to ask ourselves what it means emotionally to be with someone one isn’t used to being with for 24 hours,” Kallenbach said.

“We’ve all had to reform our sense of self with a sudden intensified intimacy. In this time of crisis, we need to ask ourselves where we find our deepest source of resilience, and look for new opportunities to create closer and more fulfilling relationships going forward.”

## Virus unsettles the world and religious practice

JORDAN MOSHE

“We are slowly but surely entering into a new world order, one which will challenge us in many ways and give us many opportunities,” says Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo, the dean of the David Cardozo Academy and the Bet Midrash of Avraham Avinu in Jerusalem. “We had better seize these opportunities with both hands. This is especially true for Jewish law.”

As people and Jews, we’ve become too complacent with the way the world operates, Cardozo told a Zoom audience at eLimmud on Sunday, 31 May. He also heads up a think tank which focuses on finding new halachic and philosophical approaches to dealing with the crisis of religion and identity amongst Jews.

“We’ve got used to the way the world works,” he said. “We see something we can rely on, take it as normal, and suddenly a virus comes along and changes it all in a moment.”

Something shocking like COVID-19 isn’t unexpected, he said.

“A little virus makes us aware of another world, a murmur that has actually always been there, but most of the time we don’t listen to it. We created a world view that was unrealistic, believing that we were in control and masters of it all.”

The shock introduced by something like a virus has shaken mankind, and made it realise that the security and complacency we took for granted was an illusion, Cardozo said.

“The arrogance that goes with that is broken down. It requires a lot of humility. We actually know and understand much less than we thought. This virus has shown us that.

“We think, we talk, breathe, and take it for granted, and a virus tells us that it’s all wishful thinking. Closed up in our homes, we are now contemplating the reality of a different world. We have woken up.”

Jewish law is actually no different, Cardozo said. Halacha’s function is to disturb, to make us upset, agitate us, and cause us to protest.

“The whole purpose of Jewish law, kashrut, Shabbat, and so on is to amaze us and ensure we never fall victim to complacency,” he said. “To live in contentment is more dangerous to human existence than anything.”

Rabbi Louis Jacobs of the United Kingdom said, “Who of us wants to live in contentment? Religion throughout the ages has been used to comfort the troubled. But today, in our convenient word, it should be used to trouble the comfortable.”

“Religion is supposed to trouble us and Rabbi Louis Jacobs show us what the purpose of life is,” Cardozo said.

This was the original purpose of Jewish law, but the halacha has fallen victim to complacency.

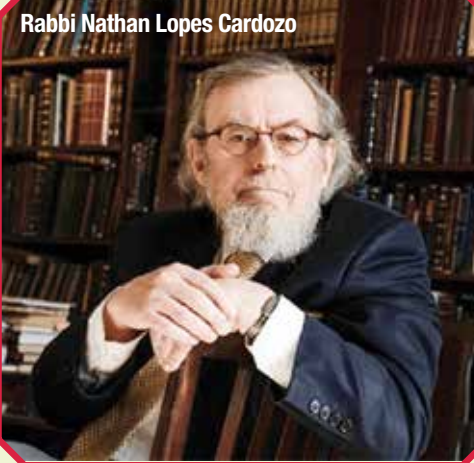
“If you live a religious life, you get used to

it, and go through motions,” he said. “We keep kosher, keep Shabbat. But that’s not the purpose. The purpose isn’t to get used to these things, just like we aren’t supposed to get used to the world.”

“We got so used to the way of life that we do it automatically, and one day is the same as the next. If you do this, you miss the point.”

Cardozo stressed that religion has lost its passion and its reason for existence.

“It needs to wake us up, to realise that religion isn’t a law that tells us what to do, but music notes. Every *mitzvah* is there to be played on a musical instrument called halacha. It’s a spiritual violin.”



Unfortunately, halacha has been derailed. In the past 2 000 years in exile, Jews have lived under difficult circumstances, and Jewish law had to make sure we would survive in those circumstances. Because of that, said Cardozo, we created defensive laws, walls around us to keep the world outside.

“It ensured our survival, but by doing so, halacha lost its ability to give us a wake-up call,” he said. “There is exile halacha and there is prophetic halacha as it was understood by the prophets who were amazed and saw the uniqueness of the world.”

Thanks to the existence of the state of Israel, we can embrace a more natural form of Jewish law.

“All communities worldwide are affected by the existence of the Jewish state,” Cardozo said. “Now, we are able to get halacha back on track, making sure it’s not just defensive, but we can stand on our own two feet.

“We don’t have to be afraid anymore. We need to remove the fear, and make halacha organic again, make sure it’s felt by all.”

We need to think in terms beyond Orthodox or reform, and look to the Talmud for the original, organic halacha, Cardozo said.

“Perhaps this moment of the virus gives us a moment to wake up. We cannot continue like this in our general lives or Jewish lives. Let’s put Jewish law where it belongs and no longer derail it.”

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# Miraculous recoveries at Highlands House

TALI FEINBERG

If an old-aged home is hit with COVID-19, the expectation is that most residents won't recover and the virus will spread like wildfire. But Highlands House Home for the Jewish Aged in Cape Town has turned that belief upside down with all 14 residents who contracted coronavirus making a full recovery over the past few weeks.

The scare at the home started when a woman contracted the virus and died on 2 May. Thereafter, the number of infections went up to 46 by 27 May, with 14 residents and 32 staff members contracting the virus.

However, the home managed to contain the virus and against all expectations, turned the situation around.

"We identified cases in the home early on, and took a systematic approach to care," says Dr Leon Geffen, who was appointed by the home to oversee the crisis. "It would be irresponsible to say there wasn't a lot of good luck and chance involved."

Geffen is overseeing the situation at Highlands House voluntarily. He has been on the panel of the World Health Organization infection and prevention control guidance for long-term care facilities, and is working with the Western Cape health department to develop an action plan for older people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We've been monitoring symptoms among residents who were tested positive daily, and keeping a close eye on their oxygen levels," Geffen says. "After the index patient [who passed away] was identified and an initial outbreak was indicated, we identified 12 positive residents during the initial screening of 187 residents in early May.

"Subsequently, we conducted a further 12 tests on residents [some were retested], including two tests on residents who passed away [neither of which were positive]. Of the 12 tests, one came

back positive. A resident became symptomatic, and was referred directly to hospital, where their positive status was confirmed. That resident has subsequently recovered, and is back at Highlands House. That brings the total number of positive cases among residents to 14 to date.

"The reason we know what happened is that we tested widely and we're keeping a close eye on anyone who may be symptomatic," Geffen says. "We have a low threshold of testing anyone who may be symptomatic, and early on, we implemented a very strict PPE [personal protective equipment] policy. We believe isolating residents in their rooms could also have curbed the spread."

As to whether he believes they have curtailed the outbreak at Highlands House, he says, "We are managing it to the best of our ability. We are assessing staff well-being, tracking staff absenteeism, and noting staff symptoms." Staff have been provided with PPE. We have adequate stock of hand sanitisers, masks, and aprons throughout the facility to protect residents and staff."

In regard to the health of the home's staff, Geffen says, "We conducted a total of 279 tests on staff, and 32 returned positive results. Subsequently, some were tested at community health clinics in early May."

One staff member reported symptoms on 25 May, tested positive, and hasn't returned to work. "All residents this person cared for have been screened by the doctor on duty, and continue to be screened daily. None of them is symptomatic. Nine of

the staff member's colleagues were also screened, one of whom reported mild symptoms on 2 June, and was asked not to come on-site.

"Of the 32 staff initially identified as positive, 31 returned to work after isolating at home for the appropriate amount of time and showing no further symptoms. The other staff member will return next week," Geffen says. "We continue to screen our staff, and they are more vigilant about their symptoms. We are tracking symptoms and absenteeism.

But most importantly, the staff has full access to all PPE, and we are meeting the necessary hygiene requirements." Testing is now done on a "case-by-case basis", Geffen says. From now on, they test those who they suspect may be infected, or anyone whose well-being is significantly declining.

"We know we're still at an early stage of the disease in the province," says Geffen. "We expect exponential positive cases outside of the home. We will maintain strict vigilance."

However, he is aware of the impact this has on residents. "We would also like to see our residents resuming a semblance of life before lockdown," he says.

"There's been a slow relaxation of strict isolation and quarantine procedures. Small groups are taking part in activities daily. Shul activities have recommenced under strict physical distancing conditions. We would like to start to allow communal meals with physical distancing, and resume other activities.

"Over the next few weeks, as the country moves through new stages of lockdown, we will consider

how best we can allow family members to visit. We will look at how we can make use of online platforms like Zoom or Skype for family to make contact with residents. However, the logistics, capacity, and resources involved are overwhelming."

Resident David Myers, who tested positive for COVID-19 in the first round of testing, remained asymptomatic, and has now made a complete recovery. "Testing positive affected me mentally, as did being in isolation," he says. "But physically, I wasn't affected."

He believes that the high number of recoveries is "testament to fantastic job by Geffen, Highlands House Deputy Director Delia Kaplan, and the entire Highlands House team who worked tirelessly and acted quickly and decisively. Some residents may feel that it's been too strict, but deep down, I think they all understand the need to be cautious."

Myers says that since he tested positive, he has been checked by a doctor once a day, and regularly by nursing staff. "If my temperature or oxygen levels changed, they were ready for action," he says.

Myers is now allowed out of his room, but is mostly restricted to his floor. He has been allowed to go outside, but movement around the home isn't encouraged. "Being outside and meeting others who tested positive, I would say we all feel similar – everyone is relieved that so many of us have recovered."

He says there has been a fundamental shift in the way residents see each other. "Prior to the outbreak, there was always some bickering amongst residents. I understand there's not a lot of interaction now, but I sense a much more supportive attitude.

"I was in the library last week watching an exercise class. One of the residents who had been positive, and was quite ill at one stage, entered the room. She has fully recovered. All those in the exercise class stopped and clapped when they saw her. It was very touching."



## ORT SA drive to connect the unconnected

ORT South Africa is urging the public to donate devices no longer being used to help bridge the digital divide for students.

"Lack of infrastructure and connectivity, along with lack of resources, including devices like smart phones, tablets, or laptops, is widening the gap between privileged and less privileged communities," says Ariellah Rosenberg, the chief executive of ORT SA.

"The coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdown highlighted the fact that South Africa is far from ready for online learning, especially township and rural schools. It's estimated that just 10% of South African households have direct access to the internet."

Arthur Goldstuck, the founder of World Wide Worx, says the lockdown has highlighted the need for connectivity for all. Goldstuck was named ORT SA's honorary IT ambassador in



2019.

"Almost 4 000 teachers and pupils have attended ORT SA coding clubs, and we must by all means try to continue these clubs through remote, online learning," says Rosenberg. "More than 1 000 youth are in ORT skills-development programmes and some are learning digital skills through IT bridging courses. Our mission is to help make people employable while creating employment opportunities."

ORT SA is also partnering with Computerlab which, together with Hewlett-Packard and other partners, is tapping into expertise to repair devices, install software, and sort out licensing.

Monetary donations can be made at [ortsa.org.za/donations](https://ortsa.org.za/donations). Those who wish to donate digital devices can call Nelly at 011 728 7154, or email [nelly@ortsa.org.za](mailto:nelly@ortsa.org.za) to arrange a drop off.

## Bethlehem honoured for 'remarkable' leadership

"I want to pay tribute to the thoughtful and visionary leaders with whom I have been fortunate to work these past four years," said Marlene Bethlehem, the outgoing president of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture (MFJC), at the Zoom meeting of its board of trustees on 8 June.

In her final meeting as the organisation's president, Bethlehem presided over a gathering of representatives from Jewish organisations from across the globe, including the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the Zentralrat of German Jews, the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the Orthodox Union, and CONIB (the Brazilian Israelite Confederation).

Present at the meeting were also a number of leading Jewish scholars, including two former chancellors of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Jonathan Arkush, who represents the Board of Deputies of British Jews, was elected to replace Bethlehem as president for the next two years.

Arkush pointed to Bethlehem's "unparalleled empathy", and her commitment to the cause of the Jewish people globally. He expressed how much he had enjoyed her leadership over the last four years, her sense of humour, and her "utter decency", that he believed singles her out as a truly remarkable Jewish leader.

Although Bethlehem is vacating the presidency of the MFJC, she is only "stepping out and not stepping away". She will join former president, Professor Ismar Schorsch, in the role of honorary president, which will allow the MFJC to call on her wisdom in the future. The South African Jewish community will continue its strong involvement with the MFJC, with Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies Chairperson Rael Kaimowitz, himself an alumnus of the International Nahum Goldmann Fellowship, replacing Bethlehem as the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' representative on the MFJC board of trustees.

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# Avoiding bringing your agenda to news

One of my least favourite biblical stories takes place about a year after the children of Israel fled Egypt. During that time, they are said to have witnessed the magical splitting of the sea, received the ten commandments, and formed a complex judicial system.

They had, in a short time, been transformed from slaves into a nation. The story takes place when they arrived at the borders of the land of Israel, when it was decided that before entering the land, they would send in 12 spies – a representative from each tribe – to check the place out.

The spies entered the country, and the Israelites waited with anticipation for word. Word, it transpires, that would be so problematic, it would result in them spending a further 40 years in the desert.

Why this is interesting to me is because the 12 spies all viewed the same place. They all saw the large people, and the giant fruit. But for 10 of them it was negative, while for two it was the opposite.

They were entrusted to report objectively, and they would definitely consider that they had done so.

The report wasn't fake news, but something equally dangerous – reporting with an agenda. This is when our bias has an impact on what we report on and how we report on it.

COVID-19 has highlighted this in multiple ways. The case of hydroxychloroquine is one such area. Towards the beginning of the pandemic, this drug was seen as a potential treatment. That was until Donald Trump, in his wisdom, decided to get involved and mention it. Why he chose to do so is anyone's guess.

Following his statement, a genius couple in the United States who would never have grown to adulthood in any prior century (because they would have run into a fire or jumped off a cliff to see if they could fly), drank fish-tank cleaner because it contained similar elements. The consequences weren't pretty, with the

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



husband dying and the wife becoming ill. In no time at all, an obscure “research” outfit called Surgisphere then released a finding that the *Lancet Medical Journal* published. The World Health Organization then halted trials of the drug. Only when it came to light that the research company was headed up by an adult film star and a science-fiction writer, was this retracted and the drug trials resumed.

Would this have happened if there wasn't an inherent bias against Trump? Of course, we can't be certain. We don't know why the *Lancet* published a finding without due diligence, but it's possible that it suited a bias.

The US in many ways is a glorious but shocking example of narrative news. Almost every subject is politicised and views are defined by which side of the aisle people sit. COVID-19 is simply a further expression of that politicisation. We need to view much of the information we receive in that context.

Every day, in preparation for my show or my columns, I get to choose what to talk about and what not to. Both are equally as important. The expression of my views has resulted in me being called a self-hating Jew, told that my late mom would be ashamed of me, and that I have no understanding of Judaism or faith.

I have been called a communist, a liberal, as well as a right-wing Neo-Nazi. I have been called a baby killer, photoshopped into gas chambers, and called some other names, which although funny, aren't so flattering. I have been threatened on numerous occasions, as has my family. Why? Because I express a view that might make someone uncomfortable. That's how strong our need for agreement is. That's why we fake news and apply our own agenda.

And that's why I do what I do.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# SA Jews meet crisis head on

As lockdown eases and people around the country tentatively start going back to “normal” – at least as far as circumstances allow – we understand that COVID-19 and the dire effect it has had on the economy will be with us for a long time to come.

Our success in negotiating these tough times will very much depend on how much we help one another, especially those whose livelihoods have been imperilled. Many members of our community will need assistance in getting back on their feet, and to the greatest extent possible, we should support those communal organisations that are doing outstanding work in helping them do so. At the same time, we must continue to support initiatives aimed at alleviating hunger and hardship in the greater society.

I have mentioned previously some of the inspiring projects that have been launched since the lockdown and before to help those most in need. Joining traditional social-outreach organisations like Afrika Tikkun, the Union of Jewish Women, and United Sisterhood are relatively new humanitarian bodies like the Angel Network, Cadena-SA, and Fingertips of Africa. To this should be added the numerous initiatives being conducted by smaller, ad hoc Jewish-headed groups under the Community Action Network (CAN) umbrella throughout Johannesburg, and the work of our regional bodies in Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, and other centres.

Through the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' (SAJBD's) Food Relief Fund launched last month (largely thanks to a generous donation for that purpose by a community member), we are contributing to a number of these outstanding organisations. On Monday, our national director, Wendy Kahn,

This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies



## ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev

accompanied Yehuda Lazarus from Fingertips of Africa to view its work in Alexandra.

This remarkable charity, founded by Yehuda in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, is supporting seven organisations. Beneficiaries include the homeless in and around the Edenvale/Greenstone area, a home for abused women and children, grandparents in Alexandra informal settlements taking care of younger generations, and orphaned and child-headed homes.

Another organisation our fund is supporting is Boikanyo – The Dion Herson Foundation. Founded by Marilyn Bassin to look after indigent children and their caregivers in Gauteng's poorest townships, this organisation has since the beginning of the lockdown been working with the e'Pap Foundation and Angel Network to reach some of the farthest-flung regions of the country. Most recently, the Save a Soul project, sponsored by the SAJBD, provided three-weeks' worth of food parcels to various villages in the Giyani district of Limpopo.

We applaud the life-saving work that is being done by Jewish organisations and individuals in all parts of South Africa, and are proud to be able to participate in it. Much remains to be done, but when looking back on this difficult and traumatic period, we know at least that at the moment of great crisis in our country's history, South African Jewry hasn't been found wanting.

• Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Jewish Board Talk, 101.9 ChaiFM, every Friday from 12:00 to 13:00.

# Back to what really matters



## SCHOOL SAVVY

Dani Sack

On the crisp Tuesday morning of 2 June 2020, I walk through the gates of Yeshiva College for the first time in more than three months.

Pumping music and rows of teachers welcome us back to school, and in spite of the cold weather, my heart fills with warmth. There is much excited chatter as I wave hello to friends, sanitise my hands, have my temperature checked, sanitise again, and make my way to class.

Assigned desks, socially distant chats, and lockdown tales characterise my days back at school, and I couldn't be more satisfied. And yet, something is preventing me from being completely content.

These past few days have been dominated by the Black Lives Matter protests in America following the horrific murder of an innocent black man, George Floyd. I've found myself desperate to help, sharing educational posts on social media, signing endless petitions, donating where I can, and educating myself about the history of racism, police brutality, white privilege, and more.

I feel a compulsion to be alongside those American citizens, protesting

against police brutality and systemic racism. As I sit in biology classes, learning about the different genes that code for certain characteristics, I can't help but wonder how one can be racist.

I understand that for many of us, this racism is internalised, something we need to unlearn, especially those of us who lived in the apartheid era, who were brought up in a racist society, and struggle to overcome taught stereotypes and supremacist ideals.

But, our genes are the same. We are all made of the same material, we all bleed the same blood – what difference does the colour of our skin make? Again, my mind wanders in history class, as my teacher explains the significance of civil disobedience and protests in the civil-rights era, and I subconsciously make the connection with the current distribution of power at a time that so closely mirrors America of the 1960s.

And then, as Youth Day approaches, the issue of systemic racism and police brutality becomes even more relevant in South Africa. Hector Pieterse, a young black schoolboy peacefully protesting Bantu Education in the Soweto uprising, was shot by a white policeman on 16 June 1976.

Clearly, this is a universal issue, and particularly relevant to us South Africans. A boy, who was just a few years younger than me was killed in Soweto in 1976

simply because of the colour of his skin, and too many black people in America are suffering the same fate today.

We have to take action and educate ourselves. We must hear the cries of people of colour everywhere who need us to amplify their voices.

As white people, we are inherently privileged. I keep that in mind as I re-enter my school after so many weeks. I'm not behind in my work. I have been able to continue to learn online, and yet my fellow matrices, those who still live in the townships and slums 26 years after the end of apartheid, have missed out on the majority of their syllabus due to a lack of equipment. It's time for change.

The American protest is on everybody's lips. My classmates and I discuss our views openly. I complain about the cold classrooms and long lessons, but every time I do, three words flash in my mind: Black Lives Matter. Because they do.

I would never attempt to be the voice of these severely oppressed people, but I would like to do my part in helping them be heard because I'm fortunate to have a wide-reaching platform. I encourage everyone to do their part and combat racism in all its forms, because in the end, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Life's most urgent question is: what are you doing for others?”

• Dani Sack is a Grade 12 pupil at Yeshiva College

# Israeli embassy supports Afrika Tikkun

The Israeli Embassy in South Africa has lent its hand to Afrika Tikkun, an agency of the Solidarity Fund, so it can up its support for communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The embassy has enabled Afrika Tikkun to increase the provision of food parcels and hygiene products to communities in Diepsloot.

At the start of the lockdown, Afrika Tikkun had to send 10 000 children home from its five centres across Gauteng and the Western Cape, but the organisation made each one leave with a month's supply of food, soap, and sanitisers for their families.

Afrika Tikkun was then selected to be one of the food parcel distributing agencies for the Solidarity Fund, a platform created by government for public and private initiatives in response to the crisis.

With the further launch of the Neighbour to Neighbour Support Program, a number of private organisations, non-profits, and community-based structures have pulled together, donating funds and items for further food-parcel

distribution.

With this initiative, and the support of many partners, Afrika Tikkun has mobilised a community level response to the COVID-19 lockdown, scaling up supplies of food and essentials for the vulnerable; thereby also providing a vehicle for the easy and efficient support of Afrika Tikkun's community efforts.

Said Marc Lubner, the chief executive of Afrika Tikkun, “We are deeply appreciative for the meaningful partnership we have enjoyed with the embassy of Israel. We are so grateful for its assistance in helping us support vulnerable communities in a safe and responsible

manner during the lockdown period.” Said Israeli Ambassador Lior Keinan, “We are always seeking to increase co-operation with local organisations on initiatives for the citizens of South Africa.”

With the extension of the lockdown period, and the phased approach to opening up the country, there is the need for an expanded feeding scheme to meet the needs of these communities. Afrika Tikkun and the Embassy of Israel are calling on all South Africans to support the Neighbour to Neighbour Support Program.





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